



Pact for Engagement

**Ten Guiding Principles for early
Public Engagement for the Development
of Energy Infrastructure Projects**

PCI Energy Days, Brussels,
Tuesday, 05 November 2024

Ten Guiding Principles for early Public Engagement for the Development of Energy Infrastructure Projects

- I. **Early involvement:** Engage public stakeholders well before the start of the planning of energy infrastructure projects by clarifying the necessity for their development to enable the energy transition.
- II. **Education and awareness:** Provide accessible, comprehensive, and understandable information to the public to foster informed decision-making and participation of the public.
- III. **Transparency:** Provide timely, clear, accurate, and accountable information to the public and involve them in decision-making processes in a meaningful and responsive way.
- IV. **Accountability:** Hold developers of infrastructure projects and decision-makers, including regulatory and permitting authorities, accountable for their actions and decisions, promoting transparency and trust. Changes in planning should be reported and reasoned.
- V. **Meaningful engagement, inclusiveness and local benefit sharing:** Encourage active and equitable participation and collaboration with a diverse range of public stakeholders, ensuring that the concerns of public stakeholders are genuinely considered and addressed, including the possibility to establish national rules enabling local benefit schemes.
- VI. **Mutual respect and trust:** Ensure all parties can participate in open communication and collaboration, including that the concerns of all stakeholders involved are genuinely considered and addressed. Aim to foster a culture of open communication and collaboration, building trust between all parties involved.
- VII. **Consistent application:** Maintain continuous engagement with public stakeholders during the time of the grid development project, ensuring that engagement is ongoing and meaningful.
- VIII. **Long-term commitment:** Encourage a long-term, collaborative approach to the development of energy infrastructure projects, fostering ongoing engagement and partnerships between infrastructure stakeholders and public stakeholders.
- IX. **Conflict resolution:** Establish clear mechanisms for addressing and resolving conflicts, ensuring that all parties can participate in finding mutually acceptable solutions.
- X. **Continuous improvement:** Regularly review and evaluate public engagement practices and adjust these practices as necessary to improve the process.

Background

Public acceptance significantly improves the smooth implementation of energy infrastructure projects if infrastructure stakeholders engage public stakeholders early on. Engaging public stakeholders and addressing their concerns can lead to improved project implementation and consequently to a more sustainable, inclusive and equitable energy transition.

The need to enhance public engagement for advancing energy infrastructure projects has been laid out by the [EU Action Plan for Grids](#) of the European Commission. The Action Plan has prepared the grounds for setting-up the [Pact for Engagement](#), which calls for early, regular and meaningful engagement of public stakeholders and the need for adequate regulatory support. The Pact has been initially signed by four organizations on 28 November 2023 and continues to be an attractive manifestation with additional infrastructure and public stakeholders discussing and pledging allegiance to the Pact.

The aim of these Guiding Principles ('Principles') is to highlight the significance of the Pact for Engagement, to provide guidance and good practices for early public engagement by infrastructure stakeholders in Member States, while acknowledging existing national and European legal provisions. The Principles themselves are not legally binding.

The Principles primarily address infrastructure stakeholders, who are involved in the development of energy infrastructure on the ground, such as developers of infrastructure projects and decision-makers, including regulatory and permitting authorities, as well as commercial industrial stakeholders, who benefit from the expansion of energy infrastructure ('infrastructure stakeholders'). The Principles promote early engagement by infrastructure stakeholders with communities, civil society organizations, and other kinds of public stakeholders in energy infrastructure development ('public stakeholders').

The Principles are the result of a consultation process, which the European Commission has commenced after setting-up the Pact for Engagement. The consultation process included representatives from Member States of the European Union, Transmission and Distribution System Operators (TSOs, DSOs), industry and public stakeholder associations, including industry representatives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others. Consequently, they outline common perspectives amongst the signatories of and additional stakeholders of the Pact for Engagement. While the Principles themselves are not legally binding, they may serve as the basis for establishing a common understanding for early Public Engagement for the Development of Energy Infrastructure Projects. The Principles are complemented by best practice examples, which were shared by contributors to the consultation process.

The European Commission will continue to discuss the aim of the Pact for Engagement in regular exchanges with infrastructure stakeholders and public stakeholders, including Member States and National Regulatory Authorities. This includes efforts to bridge the gap between the supranational – national – regional – and local level. The European Commission and stakeholders will continuously check on the relevance of the Principles and adapt and amend them as necessary.

Guiding Principles for early Public Engagement for the Development of Energy Infrastructure Projects

– Further details

I. Early involvement

When planning is foreseeable, engage public stakeholders at the earliest stages of project planning to make use of local and regional expertise on the one hand, and on the other hand identify concerns, preferences, and potential issues. In any case early involvement of public stakeholders should take place, so that their perspectives are taken into account and reasonable alternatives could possibly be identified and implemented.

II. Education and awareness

Provision of information about

- what the energy transition is about and the necessity for developing energy infrastructure projects to enable the energy transition,
- respective energy infrastructure projects, their benefits, and potential environmental and social impacts, and mitigation strategies, as well as
- the authorisation process and its opportunities for public engagement.

Stakeholders can organize workshops, public meetings, and digital platforms to disseminate information effectively, ensuring that the public is well-informed and included. Additionally, continuous communication and feedback mechanisms can be established to address concerns of public stakeholders, keep them updated on project progress, and include public interest through ensuring reciprocal communication.

III. Transparency

Public engagement processes should foster trust and public confidence in energy infrastructure projects.

Stakeholders can use different communication channels and tools, such as open data platforms, online platforms, meetings (online or in-person) or other accessible communication channels to share project information, progress, and potential impacts with the public. Project decisions and their reasoning, including how input provided via public participation and consultations has been taken into consideration by stakeholders and acted upon, should be communicated openly and as early as possible. Furthermore, an independent review mechanism could be established, e.g. with a third-party reviewer, which can ensure that decision-making processes are transparent, fair, and accountable, fostering trust and public confidence in energy infrastructure projects.

IV. Accountability

Stakeholders can establish clear performance metrics, criteria and benchmarks to assess the success of their public engagement activities as well as their energy infrastructure projects, ensuring that they adhere to environmental, social, and economic standards. Moreover, they can implement effective grievance mechanism and publish regular progress reports that hold them accountable for their decisions and actions.

V. Meaningful engagement, inclusiveness and local benefit sharing

The right balance needs to be found between public engagement and the effective implementation of the energy infrastructure projects to connect renewables to the network. Stakeholders can collaborate with local organizations and community leaders to identify and engage public groups, ensuring that their concerns are considered. They can provide data and information formats and disseminate them through media, which is convenient for diverse social groups. Additionally, providing capacity-building programs and resources can empower marginalized communities to engage in decision-making processes, fostering a more inclusive and balanced approach to energy infrastructure development.

Local benefit sharing schemes can be introduced to compensate the public for the loss of public space or improve living conditions, where national rules enable these schemes. The impact of new energy infrastructure on local/ regional industrial production for the local benefit, e.g. in terms of job creation and improving environmental conditions through reducing local power generation by fossil fuels, can be presented. Ideally, local and community benefit approaches are designed on co-creation processes with local communities and public stakeholders to ensure that actions align with local development goals and current needs.

VI. Mutual respect and trust

Stakeholders can establish regular communication channels and feedback mechanisms, ensuring that public stakeholders can express their concerns and opinions openly, keeping in mind that the responsibility for planning stays with the developer of the energy infrastructure. Moreover, fostering a collaborative approach to problem-solving and conflict resolution can help to build long-term partnerships and trust between all parties involved.

VII. Consistent application

Stakeholders can establish a public engagement plan outlining the engagement strategy, timeline, and milestones, ensuring that stakeholders are informed and involved during the project. Ideally, the timeline and milestones are shared publicly as early as possible. Additionally, conducting periodic evaluations and making improvements to public engagement practices can help maintain a consistent and meaningful approach to energy infrastructure development.

VIII. Long-term commitment

Encourage a long-term, collaborative approach to the development of energy infrastructure projects, fostering ongoing engagement and partnerships between infrastructure stakeholders and public stakeholders.

IX. Conflict resolution

Stakeholders can collaborate with neutral mediators or facilitators to guide negotiations and find mutually acceptable solutions, ensuring that all parties are heard and respected. Additionally, implementing a binding decision-making process can help resolve conflicts efficiently and promote long-term collaboration between infrastructure stakeholders and public stakeholders.

X. Continuous improvement

Stakeholders can utilize feedback from the public and performance metrics to identify areas for improvement in public engagement practices and make adjustments to these practices as necessary. Moreover, sharing best practices and lessons learned with other projects and organizations can help drive continuous improvement and promote more effective public engagement.

Perspectives on expenditures for public engagement

Beyond their own deliverables and legal obligations, national regulatory authorities of EU Member States are able and interested to encourage and support energy infrastructure developers in engaging the public early on. Early public engagement in infrastructure projects can help to make the project implementation more inclusive and time efficient. It can contribute to preventing the potential risk of increased costs of late public consultation, resulting in delayed project implementation. Oftentimes, public consultations are organized by public authorities as part of environmental proceedings and not directly by grid operators themselves.

However, it is also acknowledged that increasing public engagement activities with a more direct involvement (or leading incurred role) from grid developers in the organisation of public consultations will lead to higher operational and investment costs and possibly new types of expenses. It may add pressure on already strained resources dedicated to the implementation of grid development projects, especially in the first phase of the project.

On the one hand, it is understood that increasing public engagement activities can lead to higher investment costs in the first phase of the project development. On the other hand, decreasing the risks of a costly delay of projects due to protests or lawsuits may cost less in the long run, which is advantageous for both the infrastructure stakeholders and the consumers.

Some European regulatory frameworks may enable the recognition and integration of costs for early stakeholder engagement already, including local benefits, into the network tariff system if these costs relate to a specific investment. Thus, energy infrastructure developers may only be able to engage the public through a concrete project. Furthermore, the concern about the negative effects of local public opposition, e.g. public opposition overwriting any positive messaging and negative agenda setting regarding the infrastructure project, may lead to delayed efforts of energy infrastructure developers to engage the public. This is however contrary to the assumption that the earlier public participation for infrastructure projects starts, the more inclusive and time efficient the implementation of the project will be. Later stage public participation requires costs to significantly increase, adding to the financial risk of substantially delaying or halting the project.

Whereas national regulatory authorities explore opportunities for the recognition of costs into tariffs for the early engagement of public stakeholders, including local benefits, energy infrastructure developers explore methods to widely engage the public early on. However, it remains crucial to balance impacts on tariffs with efforts of public refinancing and impacts on consumers, particularly the most vulnerable. Under these considerations, it remains crucial to balance impacts on tariffs with efforts of public refinancing and impacts on consumers.

Best practices of stakeholders for each of the Guiding Principles for early Public Engagement for the Development of Energy Infrastructure Projects

The best practices listed here were provided by the respective stakeholders. They are not conclusive, nor do their listing signify any rating or preference. Stakeholders are encouraged to continue to add best practices.

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@TransnetBW: Early information before the start of the grid expansion project for local authorities, associations and organizations; Early, informal participation of stakeholders (also online) with the opportunity to integrate planning information into our plans before the start of the process. Then continuous communication, information and, where possible, participation across all planning phases through to construction, in parallel with technical discussions with the administrations and authorities or mayors.

@Elia and 50Hertz: The Community Relations Departments of Elia and 50Hertz engage as early as possible in the concept phase of projects. They work closely with all stakeholders such as local communities, associations, NGOs, and various government organizations. With this approach, Elia and 50Hertz build sustainable relations with them. Consequently, there are more interactions, support and buy-in from the public. Elia has a framework of agreements that were signed/ anticipated with different stakeholder groups to recognize their concerns and have standard practices/ solutions, which have been analysed upfront and can be implemented in specific projects.

@TenneT has developed comprehensive guidelines for project communication and stakeholder participation. Recognizing public participation as a foundational element, TenneT applies it in the early stages of grid projects. This approach helps to prevent the “participation paradox”, where public interest in involvement is typically low at the beginning (when changes are still feasible) but increases in later stages (when modifications are no longer possible).

To address this, TenneT proactively promotes early, informal participation with key stakeholders, including civil society and regional politicians, to understand diverse perspectives, needs, and concerns. This early engagement builds trust, identifies potential areas of conflict, and encourages coalition-building among stakeholders. These early insights gained from informal participation provide valuable knowledge that is considered during the planning and approval processes. TenneT uses a variety of channels to facilitate this engagement, including digital consultation hours and mobile information trucks that tour the region, showcasing the grid project and inviting public input.

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@Elia and 50Hertz et al.: With nine partners comprising European NGOs and TSOs, and one research institute, the EU-funded BESTGRID project worked towards modernizing and expanding the European electricity grid between 2013 and 2015. The project aimed at improving local public acceptance for grid development processes, speeding up permitting procedures while proactively addressing or even surpassing environmental protection standards, and encouraging the implementation of constructive public engagement in permitting procedures for European “projects of common interest.” By sharing their knowledge and comparing experiences, partners got a more rounded understanding of how to better implement grid expansion projects. The results of the project are available online: <http://www.bestgrid.eu/>.

@Energinet: With the intention of long-term commitment, Energinet has begun to build alliances with youth, industry, the politicians, nature non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and citizens (including landowners). Activities include meetings, workshops and common public communication, e.g. opinion pieces. In the spring of 2024, it started out with a network meeting and an open workshop on the Danish Democracy Festival Folkemøde on Bornholm and will be continued in similar events. The idea is both to promote awareness on the necessity of grids and to build relations with stakeholders that have good and lasting relations with influential shapers of public opinion and decisionmakers.

@EirGrid: In partnership with Young Social Innovators (YSI), EirGrid hosted its first ever in-person youth event in January 2023. EirGrid invited 70 participants of the YSI programme to the ‘Powering Up Event’, held in the Aviva Stadium, Dublin. Young people travelled from across the country to take part in the event which included workshops on a range of different topics, including Ireland’s 2030 targets, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Biodiversity. The groups used the information they learned and applied them to their team projects with the hope of achieving an award in the EirGrid Sponsored ‘Energy and Climate’ category of the programme. Through this partnership, we recognise the importance to involve young people in dialogue surrounding climate action efforts, and we look forward to continuing to develop and enhance this partnership in the future.

@Enedis organized ad hoc workshops held with the committees of the French electricity distribution network users before publishing its final DSO Network Development Plan (DNDP) in 2023. These consultation workshops focussed on the themes of renewable energy sources, flexibilities, and electric vehicles. They aimed to engage with the most involved stakeholders on these topics, discussing the trajectories, methods, and key messages planned for the DNDP. Following these workshops, a report was drafted to document this initial consultation phase. The workshops allow Enedis to understand the issues and points of interest of the various stakeholders, and in some cases, adapt the final content of the DNDP.

@EU DSO Entity: A Slovakian DSO introduced a public consultation process via an online platform, as part of the permitting procedures and as part of a European Project of Common Interest (PCI). The consultation process was the opportunity to communicate and educate the public stakeholders on the need for the PCI and its potential impact. It enabled dialogue and helped to raise acceptance amongst the public concerned.

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@ **Enedis** was the first company of the French energy sector to be officially recognised as a ‘purpose-driven’ company. This nomination is possible with French legislation via the act on the growth and transformation of businesses (loi plan d'action pour la croissance et la transformation des entreprises (PACTE), September 2019), encouraging companies to commit to key milestones or standards and include them in their governance. This is accompanied by obligations, including an annual evaluation of the progress on adhering to the standards of Enedis. This evaluation is concluded by nine external parties and two employee representatives.

@**EirGrid**: A Balanced and Transparent Approach to Grid Development is imperative to ensure stakeholder support. In addition to the technical issues concerning grid development, but also of crucial importance, there is a need to achieve a balance between social, environmental, and economic factors. An essential part of grid development is to understand how developing the transmission system might affect the environment. To ensure this is the case, EirGrid has developed a Framework for Grid Development, which provides a six-step “end-to-end” structure for all our transmission projects. It ensures an appropriate balance between technical, economic, environmental, social and community considerations, with significant provision for stakeholder engagement at all stages. Stakeholders and the public are consulted from Step 3 of the process and a report published on our website at the end of Steps 3 and 4 up to consenting, which outlines the project decisions and their reasoning including how the public feedback has been incorporated and acted upon.

@**EU DSO Entity**: Information on grid development is made publicly available in compliance with the Germany Energy Act, based on the Electricity Directive 2019/944/EU. The German Network Development Plans of electricity DSOs can be accessed via “VNB-digital”, the nationwide platform ensuring accessibility and transparency of information for electricity distribution systems. The online platform provides centralised access to the network development plans of the German DSOs as well as information on grid connection to the DSO network.

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@**EirGrid**: Establishment of Advisory Councils to discuss views and concerns on a variety of issues which could impact on the successful delivery of grid infrastructure including social acceptance. The existing councils are comprised of experts from academia, industry and research centres across Ireland, Northern Ireland and Europe and members have been chosen based on their wide range of knowledge and expertise in their relevant areas. The Council receive quarterly updates from EirGrid on programme delivery and on plans and timelines for decarbonisation of the electricity grid.

@**Enedis**: In France the electricity networks belong to local authorities. DSOs are linked by licenses to operate to the local authorities (contrats de concession). These licenses imply obligations for the DSOs on consulting, planning, and reporting. Furthermore, obligations exist for conducting negotiations with local decision-makers regarding investments, incl. annual reporting on these decisions. - Enedis publishes annually a report on its activities and the

evolvment of its investment strategy as one of 363 licenses to operate between French DSOs and local authorities.

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@EirGrid: A dedicated fund for new grid development is made available to provide direct benefits to communities who are closest to new transmission infrastructure. These funds, which are proportional to the scale of the project, support local good causes, help communities transform their area, and provide the opportunity to each community to become or remain a 'sustainable energy community'. The overall aim is to leave a positive legacy in the communities hosting electrical infrastructure. It is important that the distribution of this fund is decided by the communities that are impacted so for that reason EirGrid empower a local community forum to lead on this.

A local Community Forum will be established for each project that qualifies for an EirGrid Community Benefit scheme. Many projects will already have a community forum in place from the consultation and design stages of the project. Each community forum will develop a strategy for their community. The Community Forum will:

- Ensure communities are at the heart of the decision making over the project lifetime.
- Provide relevant input and key local knowledge to assist the project team in decision making.
- Work with community groups and organisations to build trust, identify local needs, grow partnerships and deliver on local projects.
- Provide governance and transparency around the implementation of Community Benefit.

The Community Forum provides advice and guidance on all aspects of the Community Fund. This includes:

- Working with EirGrid in identifying organisations and potential projects to ensure maximum impact of the community benefit in the area.
- Identifying partnership and collaboration opportunities.
- Agreeing the criteria and parameters of the fund.
- Accessing proposals for discussion and consideration.
- Inputting key local knowledge around area needs and priorities.
- Provide feedback at key stages in the process. Forum members will actively promote the Community Benefit in their area and encourage organisations to engage.

@Elia and 50Hertz: Developed a public reference framework to mitigate the impact of the realization of new infrastructure projects and to compensate for the remaining impacts.

- Avoid – Elia and 50Hertz systematically favour the scenario that has no impact on the public, landscape, or natural environment. When developing the grid, Elia seeks to use the existing corridors by upgrading the existing grid or building the new one practically on the same location than the old one.
- Reduce – Impacts that are unavoidable are limited in intensity/ size and/ or are restored. Where the construction of new infrastructure is necessary, Elia seeks, as soon as possible, to limit the potential impact by moving as far away as possible from inhabited or protected (nature, landscape, heritage) areas and by aligning on the existing infrastructure.

Independent external offices and Elia's internal experts weigh out different alternatives scenarios and identify reduction measures.

- Offset – Residual impacts that cannot be avoided, reduced, or repaired are compensated/ mitigated as much as possible in order to create a positive impact at another location.

Elia worked closely with Bond Beter Leefmilieu, a 150-member Flemish environmental umbrella organisation, when consulting a new 380kV-AC power line as part of the onshore section of the new United Kingdom--Belgium NemoLink interconnector. A series of round tables and focus groups were set up to discuss the need for new power lines.

@**TenneT GmbH**, when consulting on elements of the SuedLink/ Germany project in 2014, worked with a local branch of BirdLife Germany to set up two roundtable events on how new power lines could be constructed in an environmentally-friendly way. Additionally, the TSO worked with the NGO Deutsche Umwelthilfe who moderated a series of "info-markets" to discuss the project planning.

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@**Enedis**: At the French regional level, Enedis is involved in twelve regional stakeholder conferences (conférences des parties regionals, COP) and twelve regional committees on energy (comités régionaux de l'énergie, CRE). The COP and the CRE aim at reinforcing the input of regions in the decision-making process for energy infrastructure and agree on national objectives for their territories. In particular, CRE share their opinion on the identification of renewable energy acceleration areas.

@**EirGrid** is committed to putting citizens at the centre of its decision making. One of the ways it is doing this is by establishing community forums in areas where grid infrastructure is being proposed. This ensures that communities are consulted, and that local knowledge informs decisions at every step of the journey, from planning and design through to construction and delivering community benefit funding. Forums are chaired by an independent facilitator whose role is to ensure the independence and integrity of the forum throughout grid development projects. They ensure that all voices are heard and that there is equal and fair representation across the project area. They are responsible for communicating with forum members, arranging meetings, facilitating sessions, minute taking and capturing feedback to share with EirGrid. For full transparency and to build trust, forum meeting minutes are shared on EirGrid's website.

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@**EirGrid's** '[Our public engagement strategy for a cleaner energy future](#)', February 2021.

@**Elia and 50Hertz**: The Community Relations departments developed a toolbox for onshore and offshore electricity infrastructure development as an integrated communication and public acceptance methodology. The methodology involves stakeholders and communication actions in a systematic way in order not only to control the risk of costs and timing but also to be able to realize the best project in the interest of the society.

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@EirGrid: Central to the EirGrid strategy is its six-step approach for grid development taking stakeholders on the journey from establishing the need for grid expansion in their region through to consenting, construction, energisation and community benefit sharing. The strategy sets out how the general public and stakeholders can influence the decisions that EirGrid makes on grid development projects. The focus of the TSO has been to increase its value proposition to consumers and stakeholders while improving efficiencies in grid development. The purpose of the six-step process is to facilitate greater involvement from the public in the decisions that are made in planning and developing the grid and to improve transparency in the decision-making process.

@Elia: A structural partnership with the public utility foundation Be Planet has been established in order to develop and support ecological transition initiatives by citizens in municipalities, in which Elia infrastructure projects are developed. Through this collaboration Elia is in the process of setting up a fund and a methodology (call for citizen projects) to compensate municipalities for the impact of an overhead electricity line and to contribute to the community.

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@Amprion: Establishment of

- a working group with the municipality, citizens and local politicians to find an acceptable location for an electricity substation and realise a common solution for the surrounding and the community,
- discussion groups with the developer of the energy infrastructure, citizens and politicians,
- information markets to keep the residents informed about the participation process in the working group, and
- finding a compromise with a moderator.

@Elia and 50Hertz: A ‘third party’ to unlock potential difficult circumstances is frequently used. It can be an external moderator for an information session; or a well-respected public position to assist a debate/ meeting with different points of views of stakeholders; or a ‘supervisor’, who reviews the whole process so far and receives the mission to converge.

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@EirGrid engaged MaREI, the [Science Foundation Ireland](#) Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine, in 2021, coordinated by the [Environmental Research Institute](#) (ERI) at [University College Cork](#), to lead on a project to assist EirGrid to continually improve its engagement processes and practices. The project entails an impartial analysis of EirGrid’s evolving public engagement processes, based on a mapping of stakeholders, and a framework to codify different elements of existing strategies. This approach will simultaneously offer guidance and suggestions throughout the consultation and engagement process lifecycle, seeking to improve both engagement processes and outcomes. This includes the completion of

comparative case study in Ireland and France drawing insights from the Celtic Interconnector Project and an exploration of the community benefit funding programme which presents promising opportunities for communities to build and enhance their lead role as change agents at local level. Complementing this analysis, the project will also investigate innovative deliberative democracy instruments and processes with specific attention to aspects involved in promoting well-informed, equal and inclusive interactions that enhance energy citizenship.

More information can be found on the [MaREI website](#).

@Elia and 50Hertz: Peer reviews are continuously organized with other infrastructure managers/ developers. Metrics are used to collect feedback at the end of the public information sessions. After frameworks of agreement have been signed, regular meetings/ round tables are conducted with the stakeholders to continuously evaluate best practices and the impacts of what had been agreed in the framework.

